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Letter dated 2 May 2008 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to convey the attached annual report of the Alliance of Civilizations submitted to me by the High Representative, Jorge Sampaio.

I would be grateful if you would bring the report to the attention of the members of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) **Ban** Ki-moon

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

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Alliance of Civilizations: annual report of the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations

Summary

The present report highlights the main activities carried out by the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and his secretariat between May 2007 and April 2008, in accordance with the implementation plan submitted to the Secretary-General on 14 June 2007. It complements the information contained in the report of the High-level Group on the Alliance of Civilizations as well as the Alliance's programme of action, which is outlined in part 2 of the implementation plan.

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I. Introduction

1. The Alliance of Civilizations was established in 2005 at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. It aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among States and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism.

2. The first phase of the Alliance started with the creation by the Secretary-General of a High-level Group of 20 eminent personalities mandated to produce a report exploring the roots of polarization between cultures and societies worldwide and proposing practical recommendations to address this growing trend. The High-level Group presented its report to Secretary-General Kofi Annan in November 2006.

3. In April 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as High Representative for the Alliance. This marked the beginning of the second phase of the Alliance of Civilizations, with the development of an action-oriented implementation plan focusing on initiatives and projects in the areas of youth, media, education and migration.

4. On 14 June 2007, the High Representative submitted to the Secretary-General an implementation plan for 2007-2009 divided in two parts. Part 1 provided an overview of the defining principles and the structure that will support the work of the Alliance, including a mechanism for partnership building, advocacy, financing and priority setting in its four fields of action (i.e., youth, media, education and migration). Part 2 outlined the Alliance's programme of action for the coming two years, although a midterm review of the programme since the holding of the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum is expected.

5. The Alliance's focus on concrete initiatives was reinforced and consolidated at the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum, hosted by the Government of Spain in Madrid on 15 and 16 January 2008. The Forum was a high-profile, action-oriented event which brought together a powerful network of political leaders, Governments, international organizations, civil society groups, religious communities, as well as media and corporate leaders.

6. Being considered a turning point in the implementing process of the Alliance, the activities carried out between the appointment of the High Representative and the Forum were mostly dedicated to its preparation. During this period, apart from coordinating the overall activities and developing effective governance for the Alliance, the High Representative has developed an intensive programme of high-level consultations aimed at enlarging the "group of friends", reinforcing political support for the Alliance at the global level and promoting the work of the Alliance worldwide.

II. Main activities

7. Below are some of the achievements of the Alliance of Civilizations between May 2007 and the holding of the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum on 15 and 16 January 2008. A summary of that event and its main outcomes is included in section III of the present report.

Expansion of political support and momentum building

8. Since April 2007 the "group of friends" community has grown markedly — from 44 members when the High Representative was appointed to 84 at the time of writing of the present report. The geographical breadth of membership in the group is wide and, in many cases, their engagement with the Alliance is deepening, as reflected by attendance at the meetings of the group, senior-level participation in the first forum of the Alliance in Madrid and invitations for the participation of the Alliance or requests for the granting of its auspices for conferences and events organized by individual members of the group. The fact that the Alliance of Civilizations has been mentioned by the Secretary-General at his high-level meetings with both political and civil society leaders has been extremely helpful in building and maintaining the political support for the Alliance, and this support is greatly appreciated.

Establishment of national strategies to advance the Alliance of Civilizations

9. At the urging of the High Representative requesting that member States of the group of friends present national strategies for cross-cultural dialogue covering the four main fields of the Alliance (education, media, youth and migration), four countries — Spain, Turkey, Bulgaria and New Zealand — have announced national strategies to advance the objectives of the Alliance within their own borders, and more are expected to follow suit in the coming year. As the High Representative noted at the time he proposed the establishment of national strategies, this decentralization of activities related to the Alliance advanced with the support of strong political will in individual countries is perhaps the best way to ensure that the Alliance achieves sustainable and long-term impact.

[P]artnership agreements with major agencies

10. The Alliance of Civilizations has completed five partnership agreements with multilateral agencies and international organizations (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the League of Arab States, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and the United Cities and Local Governments) all of which focus on specific elements of the Alliance's implementation plan, as endorsed by the Secretary-General in June 2007. A letter of intent has been signed with the Council of Europe confirming the mutual will to prepare a bilateral memorandum of understanding to be signed in the near future. Other international organizations, including the European Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, have also been approached in order to conclude memorandums of understanding with the Alliance.

11. These organizations and agencies represent the largest and most relevant entities working to foster cross-cultural understanding and cooperation, particularly between Western countries and predominantly Muslim countries, and, as such, are important stakeholders and actors. The partnership agreements reflect the seriousness with which the Alliance of Civilizations is taken by established players and also reflect the intention of the Alliance to act through cooperative arrangements with organizations that have well-established track records in fields of concern to the Alliance, including its intention to avoid duplication of efforts.

Expansion of financial support

12. Following the appointment of the High Representative in April 2007, a dedicated voluntary trust fund was established through which the Alliance has attracted over $3.8 million in financial support from 14 countries, including 10 first-time contributors. This represents a more than 100 per cent increase in funds raised between the launch of the Alliance in July 2005 and the appointment of the High Representative. The strong support of the Secretary-General, as indicated by his letter to all Heads of Government announcing the establishment of the trust fund and encouraging contributions to it, was critical to this fund-raising effort.

Establishment of a network of Alliance of Civilizations ambassadors

13. Criteria and a selection process for the appointment of "Alliance of Civilizations goodwill ambassadors" as well as a concept paper on a network of ambassadors have been developed. The Alliance ambassadors are to be a group of high-profile well-networked individuals who can extend the outreach and profile of the Alliance of Civilizations, advocate in favour of its objectives and projects, support fund-raising and, upon request by the High Representative, speak on behalf of the initiative in select international forums and meetings.

14. The plan is to create a functioning network, made up of three different types of ambassadors: a core group composed by former members of the High-level Group; group of eight personalities, chosen on the basis of their relevance and outreach within the four fields of action of the Alliance; and small group to be formed of a number of celebrities. In the time being, the High Representative approached the 20 former members of the High-level Group regarding their willingness to serve as the first slate of ambassadors. The formal procedure of appointment by the Secretary-General is under way.

Network of focal points of the Alliance

15. The High Representative called upon each of the members of the group of friends to appoint a focal point to serve as the national/principal coordinator on the Alliance's issues within countries and organizations and to serve as the main interlocutors with the Alliance.

16. The establishment of a network of focal points will facilitate a regular and consistent exchange of views on the Alliance as well as a closer cooperation among members of the group of friends in the four fields of action covered by the Alliance, with a view to advancing its goals.

Launch of the Alliance of Civilizations online clearing house

17. February 2008 marked the launch of the first theme on the Alliance of Civilizations clearing house, which focused on media literacy education (see http://www.aocmedialiteracy.org). In addition to the voluminous information on media literacy education programmes and policies available on the website, it has also become a virtual meeting place for media literacy education advocates, researchers and policymakers from every region of the world.

18. The Alliance has established partnership agreements with 16 universities and research centres and is in the process of negotiating more. It is intended that the site will be regularly populated with articles, announcements and reviews of conferences

and publications related to media literacy education. Given the growing presence of the media worldwide, the field of the media literacy education is becoming increasingly important within the broader field of cross-cultural relations and education for tolerance.

Launch of the Alliance of Civilizations rapid response media mechanism

19. In February 2008 the Alliance launched its rapid response media mechanism, an initiative aimed at supporting the work of media professionals by connecting them with leading experts and analysts, who can comment on intercultural issues, particularly in times of crisis. The mechanism works through outreach from the secretariat of the Alliance to leading media agencies and includes a web-based directory of experts and commentators (http://www.globalexpertfinder.org), which is easily searchable by subject and region of expertise as well as language capacity.

20. The concept of the media mechanism inspired a great deal of interest and support in both media and political circles during the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Madrid. President Tarja Halonen of Finland participated in the working session focused on the mechanism. Shortly thereafter, Finland established its own national rapid response media mechanism in the Alliance's model.

21. The mechanism has already been mobilized around the production, by the right-wing Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, of a film denigrating Islam and desecrating Islam's holy book, the Qur'an. An opinion piece co-signed by Muslim religious leaders from diverse regions, a slate of 10 experts from diverse regions prepared to provide insightful comment and analysis on the film through mass media outlets and consultations with influential civil society partners to reduce potential negative fall-out were all mobilized in anticipation of the film's expected release date in late March 2008. The office of the High Representative has maintained contact with Dutch Government officials throughout this process to ensure coordination during the sensitive weeks leading up to the eventual release of the film.

Establishment of the Youth Solidarity Fund

22. The Alliance of Civilizations has launched a Youth Solidarity Fund to support youth-led initiatives that promote long-term constructive relationships between young people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The Fund will provide seed funding in amounts of up to $20,000 to outstanding youth-led projects in one or more of the following areas: intercultural and interreligious exchanges; youth leadership training; and youth voices in the media. The need for the Fund was determined following consultations with diverse youth-led networks and youth-focused organizations, which made clear that there are a member of youth forums generating "calls to action" or programmatic ideas, but a lack of financial support to turn those plans into reality.

23. The Alliance Secretariat, in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Project Services, is managing the Fund and is currently establishing a Youth Advisory Committee in cooperation with regional youth platforms to ensure youth participation in the selection of projects for funding. The European Youth Forum, the Islamic Conference Youth Forum and the Latin American Youth Forum have already agreed to serve on the Committee. Negotiations are under way with the Asian Youth Council, the Pan-African Youth Union and the Pacific Youth Council.

Together these youth-led organizations will provide global representation and outreach. The call for applications to the Youth Solidarity Fund was published on the Alliance website on 7 March 2008 and will remain open until the end of April.

Launch of two multi-million dollar funds in the fields of youth employment and mass media for social change

24. In the months leading up to the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum, the secretariat worked with civil society agencies, business leaders and investors and global personalities, including Queen Noor of Jordan and Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser el-Missned of Qatar, to lay the groundwork for two major new funds to be launched: the Silatech youth employment initiative and the Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund.

25. With an initial $100 million investment from Qatar and partnership agreements with both the World Bank and Cisco, Silatech aims to support youth enterprise and entrepreneurship, career counselling and job training, and to connect job supply with job demand, beginning with pilot programmes in the Arab world, where youth unemployment rates are among the highest in the world.

26. Announced at the Forum by Queen Noor, the Media Fund has been established with an initial $10 million contribution from private business leaders and partnerships with leading Hollywood production, distribution and talent agencies, including Participant Productions, Summit Entertainment and International Creative Management as well as an agreement with YouTube for Alliance media productions to be featured on a dedicated YouTube channel. Initial productions of the Media Fund will be feature films and documentaries that aim to address issues of cross-cultural relations by, for example, increasing and diversifying the portrayal of often-stereotyped minorities in major Hollywood film productions. The Fund will also support research on the impact of visual media on cross-cultural relations, violence and self-perception of minority communities. Initial research has already been commissioned and is under way through a joint research venture of the Harvard School of Public Health and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The visibility of the Alliance of Civilizations

27. Although much remains to be done to develop a consistent communications strategy for the Alliance, its visibility has increased significantly since April 2007. In the run-up to the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Madrid, the initiative's website was redesigned to emphasize its practical projects and partnerships, particularly in the areas of education, youth and media. Since the relaunch of the website, the number of hits reached over 300,000 in January 2008 and 200,000 in February 2008. Media coverage expanded significantly, particularly as a result of the forum. During and after the forum, over 800 media reports (including print, Internet, television and radio) focused on the Alliance and the outcomes of the forum. Coverage included reports from Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, South-East Asia and the United States of America.

28. The Alliance of Civilizations has also been represented — by the High Representative himself or by senior members of the Alliance of Civilizations secretariat — at over 50 international conferences and meetings since the High Representative was appointed in April 2007, indicating a high and widespread demand for information on and partnership with the Alliance.

29. Two initiatives drew significant attention from the international media: the Media Fund and the Youth Employment Centre (Silatech). An interview with the Secretary-General on Al Jazeera international at the time of the forum also helped bring international attention to the work and objectives of the Alliance. In addition, op-ed articles by the High Representative highlighted the work of the Alliance with audiences in the United States, Europe and the Middle East.

30. Moreover, since the launch of the media literacy education online clearing house, the rapid response media mechanism and the Youth Solidarity Fund, each of which has a web presence linked directly to the Alliance website, the Alliance secretariat has received increased interest from a wide variety of organizations and groups, particularly regional and international youth networks and associations, media outlets and international networks of universities and educational institutions. The recently activated online forum for the clearing house on media literacy education and the Alliance of Civilizations youth programme will serve as platforms for ongoing interactive discussions and debates in these respective areas, further enhancing the visibility of the Alliance.

III. First Alliance of Civilizations Forum: a turning point

31. Hosted by the Government of Spain, the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum convened over 500 delegates, leaders, activists and public figures from every region of the world in an effort to address the problems of growing extremism and polarization between cultures and communities. For over one and a half days, political leaders, including Heads of State and Government, civil society activists, Nobel laureates, corporate executives, religious leaders and leading scholars, dialogued and debated with each other, launched practical initiatives, and made commitments to action aimed at improving relations across regions and cultures.

32. The Madrid Forum provided participants with a unique international platform to develop joint initiatives and forge partnerships. In addition to a high-level political debate attended by ministers, major leading figures of international organizations and other senior representatives of the Alliance of Civilizations' "group of friends", the forum featured announcements of major new initiatives and project-specific working sessions on a wide range of cross-cultural issues, including media literacy education, conflict prevention at the community level and the contribution of the corporate sector to promoting intercultural understanding. With more than 1,000 journalists and media professionals attending the forum, the event received widespread international coverage.

33. Following opening remarks by the President of the Government of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, and the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Jorge Sampaio, the Forum featured three plenary panels which defined the priority issues to be addressed at the Forum and set a pragmatic tone for the ensuing discussions.

34. Preceding each panel was a major announcement which underscored the Alliance's results-oriented approach:

(a) An announcement by Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser el-Missned of Qatar of a $100 million investment to launch Silatech, a global youth employment initiative involving founding partnerships with the World Bank and Cisco;

(b) An announcement by Queen Noor of Jordan of an independent Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund to support film productions that foster cross-cultural understanding, with an initial $10 million committed and founding partnerships with major Hollywood talent, distribution and production companies.

35. Participants spent the remainder of the first day of the forum and the morning of the second day in smaller focused discussion groups, including a high-level political dialogue for members of the Alliance of Civilizations' group of friends, eight working sessions and two working breakfasts. In these sessions, participants delved deeper into the issues of politics, economics, culture and religion that are central to expanding cross-cultural understanding, shared security, and peace. Several practical initiatives were generated or launched, including:

(a) Announcements by Governments of national strategies aimed at advancing the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations;

(b) Signing of partnership agreements and memorandums of understanding between the Alliance and major multilateral agencies and international organizations;

(c) Establishment of a network of goodwill ambassadors, which former members of the high-level group were invited to join;

(d) The launch of a rapid response media mechanism;

(e) The debut of an online clearing house on policies and projects related to the Alliance;

(f) Formation of a North-South network of private foundations and philanthropists;

(g) Issuing of a consensus statement by diverse religious leaders committing to advance conflict resolution and to aid youth to avoid the allure of extremists;

(h) Commitment by the United Nations Global Compact to producing a publication aimed at raising the visibility of best practices in the corporate sector towards supporting cross-cultural relations;

(i) Prioritization of cross-regional youth mobilization and exchanges to be supported by a newly created Youth Solidarity Fund.

36. In the framework of the high-level debate, restricted to members of the group of friends, discussions at the policymaking level were held that highlighted the importance to move the Alliance forward in 2008, including: developing joint multi-stakeholder initiatives at the regional level aimed at promoting intercultural understanding and preventing the mounting of tensions and the rise of extremism; contributing to the improvement of intercultural dialogue in countries belonging to the European-Mediterranean region; and launching a number of activities within the framework of city diplomacy.

37. The third plenary panel held at the end of the forum served to make the transition from the wide-ranging discussions held at the forum to the mechanisms for implementation and action that are to follow in the coming months. The High

Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations closed the forum by reviewing its main outcomes and committing to work with the members of the group of friends and the Alliance's many partner organizations to ensure follow-up on the ideas, commitments and project launches advanced at the forum. A full and comprehensive report on the forum is being prepared and will be disseminated shortly.

IV. Conclusion

38. In the last 10 months, the Alliance of Civilizations has made significant progress thanks to the engagement of the Secretary-General, the co-sponsors and the ever-growing group of friends. Roughly speaking, it can be said that the path has been set out: the report has been put into operation through a plan of action and the priority projects established therein have been put into motion; the Secretariat's staff of 10 is now nearly complete; the number of members of the group of friends has doubled; and both the States and the international organizations that make up the group of friends have now been called upon to perform a structural role that is absolutely irreplaceable in implementing the Alliance's objectives at the global level.

39. However, a great deal of the future of the Alliance will be determined in the coming months. In order to turn the Alliance into a sustainable initiative, three conditions need to be fulfilled: it has to be anchored in the regional processes under way and integrated into regional agendas; it has to be included in national agendas; it has to succeed in mobilizing civil society if its ultimate goal — to achieve small improvements in the field that will bring fresh hope to people — is not to be compromised.

40. This is why the High Representative has been insisting and will continue to insist on the importance of the national strategies for cross-cultural dialogue at the State level; on the partnership agreements with international organizations and bodies; and on the strengthening of the network to bring on board civil society's input and contribution.

41. In order to achieve these goals, the High Representative will put forward some additional ideas to materialize the Alliance's aims and turn them into deliverables, taking advantage of the strong commitment by several States to help move the Alliance forward; of new possibilities of cooperation stemming from partnerships with some prominent international organizations; and of ongoing discussions with civil society representatives at large. These proposals should be considered as complementing the priority projects identified in the implementation plan, which will be developed throughout the year.

42. As for the main challenges ahead of the Alliance, to be overcome in the coming months, four should be stressed: unity of intentions and of action; integration; keeping the Alliance a lightweight but effective structure; and financing.

43. Each partner may be tempted to use the Alliance as an instrument in the service of their own interests. But it is essential, in addition to the multiplicity of uses to which it can be put, to preserve the unity of intentions and of action. In order to maintain long-term coherence and sustainable results, the unity and the depth of the Alliance's agenda should be increased. Therefore, unity of purpose and a deepening, insofar as the plan of action is concerned, of the implementation of

projects, programmes and initiatives will be a key priority for the High Representative in the coming months.

44. There must also be an integration of the agenda of the Alliance within the United Nations system, with the regional processes under way, and also with national policies and regional and local initiatives. The High Representative will focus his action on promoting these goals. A particularly critical point which has to be developed as a top priority is the full integration of the Alliance's agenda within the complex United Nations structure in order to take advantage of possible synergies, stimulate a closer cooperation and help improve coordination of the many parts of the institutional machinery of the United Nations in the areas of direct concern to the Alliance. Moreover, the Alliance should start emerging smoothly as a tool for preventive diplomacy aimed at intervening in pre- and post-cultural conflict situations.

45. To ensure that the Alliance remains a lightweight but effective structure will be a third priority for the High Representative. In order to achieve this goal, the full development of the network of goodwill ambassadors of the Alliance, the focal points and the partnerships with organizations of civil society, foundations and the corporate sector to help us in advancing our common goals is of paramount importance.

46. Fund-raising efforts for the Alliance have generated results, and the Secretary-General's letter to Heads of Government in that regard provided significant support. But these efforts need to be sustained in order to ensure the long-term viability of the Alliance. In the coming months, the High Representative will be approaching a range of possible funders, including Governments, foundations and corporate players.

47. Raising the profile of the Alliance and its outreach is another priority for the coming months. On the one hand, this means bringing on board some remaining key players (States, international and regional organizations, or other influential non-State actors such as religious and confessional groups); on the other hand, it means developing a worldwide communications strategy for the Alliance.

Annex

Alliance of Civilizations: addendum to the implementation plan

March 2008

I. Introduction

Subsequent to the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum, held in Madrid on 15 and 16 January 2008, a number of decisions and initiatives have emerged that will help consolidate the work of the Alliance and further define its main strategic objectives.

Taking stock of these initiatives and of the outcomes of the Madrid Forum, the present addendum outlines additional priority areas that are complementary to the Alliance's implementation plan and that will help shape the work of the Alliance in the 2008-2009 period.

The addendum represents the midterm review of the Alliance's programme of action, announced in the introductory remarks to part 2 (Alliance of Civilizations programme of action) of the implementation plan (2007-2009), which was presented in June 2007.

II. Structure of the Alliance

A. The Alliance of Civilizations Voluntary Trust Fund

Following the presentation of the terms of reference for the Alliance's Voluntary Trust Fund, fund-raising efforts for the Alliance have generated results, and the Secretary-General's letter to Heads of Government in that regard provided significant support. These efforts need to be sustained, however, in order to ensure the long-term viability of the Alliance. In the coming months, the High Representative will be approaching a range of possible funders, including Governments, foundations and corporate players. In this task, the High Representative could be helped by goodwill ambassadors for the Alliance as well as by the North-South network of private foundations and philanthropists created at the forum. In this regard, the role of the group of friends will also be crucial.

B. Group of friends

Further expansion of the group of friends will be sought, particularly in order to bring on board a number of missing significant partners.

C. Focal points

In order to strengthen the process of developing these partnerships, each member of the group of friends (both Governments and multilateral organizations) should designate a focal point to be responsible for coordinating the implementation of national strategies, oversee regional partnerships and liaise with the Alliance secretariat.

D. Network of Alliance ambassadors

Following the Madrid Forum, plans for the establishment of a network of Alliance ambassadors have been further defined, in accordance with the concept paper, Network of the Alliance of Civilizations' ambassadors, circulated at the forum in Madrid.

The network will be developed to support the work of the Alliance and the High Representative by engaging, inter alia, in public advocacy to raise awareness of the aims, objectives and priorities of the Alliance, convey messages about its activities (in the form of public declarations, op-eds, and video statements) and extend its public outreach, including fund-raising. The ambassadors will hold at least one meeting a year, on the occasion of the Alliance's annual Forum. There will be three categories of Alliance ambassadors:

(a) Former members of the high-level group (20): their main task will be to disseminate knowledge about the Alliance and to help build support for it in their own regions or particular spheres of influence;

(b) Experts in the areas of youth, media, education and migration (8): their role will be to help build support for the Alliance and its projects in their fields of activity;

(c) Celebrities (5-10): this group will consist of high-profile personalities and celebrities from the worlds of entertainment, sport and entrepreneurship, including leaders and philanthropists. Their role will be to help highlight the work of the Alliance and make its objectives better known and understood by the general public.

E. Informal advisory group to the High Representative

As announced in September 2007 at the first high-level meeting with the members of the group of friends, an informal advisory group to help the High Representative manage the Alliance of Civilizations will be set up. Rather than being an institutional body, it will be a small management think tank, serving as a sounding board for the concerns of the High Representative, sharing ideas and giving him honest advice.

It will be composed of 12 people who share a genuine interest in the thematic fields and areas of action of the Alliance and who will be able to develop a relationship of trust with the High Representative. Apart from representatives of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the co-sponsoring countries, Spain and Turkey, the other nine members will be selected from among distinguished world personalities who are qualified on the basis of achievement, experience, independence and integrity, taking into account the cultural and religious divides worldwide.

III. Meetings and forums of the Alliance

A. Meetings of the group of friends

In principle, the group of friends will meet as a whole four times a year — twice as a meeting of permanent representatives (midterm meetings) and twice as a ministerial meeting (in September, during General Assembly week and on the

occasion of the annual forum of the Alliance). As the group of friends has become quite a large assembly, functional ways to facilitate a more informal dialogue between participants should be examined and implemented.

B. Meetings of focal points

In order to promote exchange of information and experience in the process of developing and implementing national strategies, a voluntary task force, bringing together the focal points of the group of friends, will be established to provide support to members of the group wishing to take advantage of the experience of others and share best practices.

C. Boosting regional action by the Alliance

In order to build global support for the Alliance and support the implementation of its initiatives internationally, it is necessary to create strong regional networks. These networks should be supported by proactive leadership from Governments, civil society and religious groups, as well as the private sector.

The Alliance will promote a set of initiatives, hosted on a voluntary basis by States, aimed at addressing specific issues and concerns shared by a number of members. A calendar of initiatives will be proposed to the group of friends in the near future.

IV. Partnership/project development

To support its implementation process, the Alliance will seek to further strengthen its network of partnerships, particularly among the group of friends, but also with civil society organizations, such as universities and foundations.

A. National strategies for cross-cultural dialogue

In order to support the objectives and projects of the Alliance worldwide, members of the group of friends are encouraged to develop national strategies for cross-cultural dialogue, which should outline, inter alia, plans for incorporating intercultural projects into Government policies on education, youth, media and migration, as well as specific initiatives and collaborative projects across government departments. Such plans should be made in partnership with other Governments, regional and multilateral organizations and civil society bodies.

International and multilateral organizations that are members of the group of friends are also encouraged to assist countries in developing national strategies that incorporate intercultural projects into their plans of action and promote collaboration with other organizations regionally and globally.

B. Implementation of projects in collaboration with international organizations, partners and other stakeholders

To follow up on the memorandums of understanding that have been signed with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the League of Arab States, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization and United Cities and Local Governments and on the letter of intent signed with the

Council of Europe, the Alliance will work closely with each of these partners to identify concrete projects and initiatives that can be launched or further developed.

The Alliance will promote partnerships and joint action in two priority areas. These multi-stakeholder partnerships will involve Governments, multilateral organizations, civil society, foundations, religious groups, the media and the private sector.

C. The Mediterranean region: one of the Alliance's main areas of focus

The Alliance will seek to support ongoing efforts to improve intercultural dialogue within and among European and Muslim societies and communities in the Mediterranean region through collaboration with a number of regional and multilateral organizations as well as Governments. In so doing, the Alliance will focus on strengthening and expanding existing initiatives in order to avoid duplication of programmes.

D. Investing in city diplomacy initiatives

The Alliance will seek to serve as a catalyst to promote city-to-city diplomacy initiatives and support efforts of local and municipal authorities to create the conditions for sustainable peace between divided communities. To this end, the Alliance will promote the establishment of a coalition of Alliance mayors, in cooperation with, inter alia, United Cities and Local Governments.

E. Network of philanthropic foundations and private funders

A Network of philanthropic foundations and private funders will be established to share information about intercultural programmes and other issues related to the Alliance, raise awareness of ongoing initiatives in these areas and explore ways to leverage existing resources for greater impact.

F. Network of universities, research centres and think tanks

The Alliance will develop a global network of universities and think tanks in order to support its work and help improve relations among diverse cultural and religious communities worldwide. This network will start with a core group of 10 to 15 universities and research centres with strong track records in intercultural and conflict resolution studies. The main objectives of the network will be: (a) to promote cooperation, exchange of expertise and joint research among participating institutions in the areas of intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural relations; (b) to support and help disseminate research about these issues within and beyond the network, particularly among policymakers, Government departments, civil society organizations and the media; and (c) to support the development of the Alliance of Civilizations projects.

V. Project development

A. Rapid response media mechanism

Following the successful launch of the global expert finder resource, the Alliance will work on the expansion of the database, create additional features

(including improved search capability, expert interviews and enhanced design) and organize media training sessions for experts.

B. Alliance of Civilizations clearing house

Further to the successful creation of the media literacy education theme under the Alliance of Civilizations on the clearing house project, the Alliance will work towards the strengthening of the network of partner organizations that will administer the clearing house. The Alliance will also initiate work on the development of other clearing house themes.

C. Youth programme

1. Youth Solidarity Fund

A Youth Solidarity Fund will be established to provide seed funding to outstanding youth-led projects that promote long-term intercultural bridge-building. Grant size will vary from $5,000 to $20,000. The Alliance will strive to ensure a geographic and thematic balance among selected projects. The Alliance secretariat will manage the Fund and work with partners and a youth advisory committee to ensure youth participation in the selection of projects for funding.

2. Partnership development

In accordance with memorandums of understanding signed to date, the Alliance will strengthen its collaboration with partner organizations in the youth area. The Alliance will also engage regional youth platforms to provide youth representation and mainstream youth voices in its initiatives by setting up a youth advisory committee.